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SUBJECT: FMR BIAFRAN PRESIDENT GENERAL OJUKWU MEETS WITH CG

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Consul General and POLOFF (notetaker) met with former Biafran President General Chief Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu and his assistant Prince Bob J. Onyema on 10 November. Ojukwu has plans to travel to the US at the end of November. Ojukwu discussed court cases contesting the results of the 2003 national election; the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) party's consultations with the All Nigeria's People's Party (ANPP) and the 2007 presidential election; national reforms and economic development; Biafran independence groups; and politics of the South-South and South-East. END SUMMARY

CONTEST OF THE 2003 ELECTION RESULTS

12. (SBU) "I oppose the presidency of Obasanjo, that is what I do generally," was his opening greeting to the CG when asked of his current activities. Ojukwu speculated on pending court cases contesting gubernatorial elections, believing that the results could be overturned in APGA's favor in two states in the South-East and one in the South-South. He commented that Governor Muhammadu Buhari's contest of the 2003 presidential election "will take a long time" because there is "no capable judge or one who has the courage to pronounce" a decision against Obasanjo. Ojukwu prophesied a two-year court battle, resulting in no "dramatic change." Ojukwu concluded by saying that the President's People's Democratic Party (PDP) "didn't do very well; they won, but they didn't do very well."

APGA AND ANPP UNIFIED FOR 2007?

13. (SBU) Ojukwu turned his attention to the 2007 presidential election. He does not believe that Buhari and the ANPP will win the national election, but believes the party will consolidate its position in the North. A "viable alliance" between the north's ANPP and the east's APGA might improve ANPP's chances and he stated that APGA is already "seeing what we can do." Although Ojukwu said there are many things that the ANPP and APGA agree upon -- such as stamping out corruption -- he foresaw stumbling blocks in regards to economic development, and appointments based on quotas instead of merit. Furthermore, Ojukwu does not believe there can be any compromise on Shari'a between the devoutly Catholic Igbos and northern Muslims and he questioned why Nigeria should be a member of the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC). On the economic front, Ojukwu said that the continued marginalization and slow to non-existent economic development in the Niger Delta and South-East would not be alleviated by the ANPP. However, Ojukwu views the consultation between the ANPP and APGA positively and believes that continuous dialogue will improve conditions in the long run, despite their disagreements.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND REFORMS

14. (SBU) Other OPEC countries, Ojukwu explained, use oil revenues to build roads, but in Nigeria "we use oil to feed people - a policy that needs to be changed." He argued that Arab nations do not need oil for foodstuffs because their populations are small. Then he blamed the oil producing Arab states for making "corruption a way of life," presumably making a parallel to the chronic state of corruption in Nigeria, especially in regards to oil revenues. The CG asked if the need for oil was exacerbated because Nigerians have left their former economic activities, such as agriculture, for jobs in the oil sector. Ojukwu insisted that this development occurred before the oil boom, stating that Malaysia once used Nigeria as a model for its palm oil industry, of which Nigeria was a major exporter. Now Nigeria imports palm oil from Malaysia. The CG pointed to the vast plantations in Malaysia and questioned why Nigeria could not do the same. Ojukwu likened the disparity to the lack of national identity in Nigeria. Malaysia has "a polity with a

sense of nationhood that we don't have," Ojukwu continued to explain. Everything in Nigeria is destroyed, because Nigerians first think of their ethnicity and not of their country no matter how large or small the event is. "Until we can find that polity, we will not progress. We need a national conference to redesign Nigeria for Nigerians as opposed to a patchwork of Nigeria to suit British commercial interests. We were handed Nigeria in that form and we are too shy to do something fundamentally different."

15. (SBU) Ojukwu showed great optimism for Nigeria, believing it could become "the biggest and most dynamic country in black Africa, but first it must become a cohesive nation. No one can do it for us, but ourselves." He stressed the need for constitutional reform and decentralization, saying "it should be written into the constitution that there must be a constitutional review every five years. If we don't, we are mortgaging the future of the next generation based on the ignorance of the previous one." However, Ojukwu expressed sadness in the fact that any cause he were to champion would be colored by the Biafran War and perceived as a means to lead Biafrans again. Nevertheless, Ojukwu concluded, "I am still alive. I am still Nigerian and I will continue to make suggestions."

BIAFRAN INDEPENDENCE GROUPS

16. (SBU) When asked about Biafran independence groups, Ojukwu said that they represent mostly youths exercising freedom of expression. He did not believe that they can succeed in the short-run and was not alarmed by their assertions. He did, however, describe this movement as a reflection of the frustrations of the people in the region, highlighting the economic deprivation and unemployment that plagues the nation and the Ibos of the East. "Even in democratic practice, we should learn to tolerate things unpleasant," Ojukwu opined. He recounted that in a meeting with President Obasanjo, Ojukwu could not denounce these groups as "they are Ibos and have some justifications." He advised the President to listen to them and find ways to alleviate their problems. "It is a cry; and as a President you should do something to help them." In the east, the most dangerous development is hunger. Ojukwu observed that distended stomachs were becoming a common sight in the East and he worried that when properly enraged, these people may make the troubles in the Delta seem minor by comparison.

SOUTHERN POLITICS: A JAMBALAYA

17. (SBU) The Federal Government has long ignored the plights of Delta and Rivers States, Ojukwu explained. He stressed the irony that the region that produces the nation's wealth does not reflect it and the people of the region "are doing nothing, not even agriculture." He understood their frustration and expressed compassion for their condition. "No amount of troops will quell the political effort," he said in reference to the Nigerian military's Operation Restore Hope in Delta State. "The side I find troublesome is the blackmailing of oil companies. I don't support that transaction. They should blackmail their own government" to do something about their problems rather than the companies that were easy targets. Furthermore, Ojukwu regretted the practice because "success triggers" the trend. There needs to be a long-term solution from the GON.

THE TROUBLE WITH ANAMBRA

18. (SBU) Ojukwu ended his discussion by focusing on the state politics of Anambra and the need for decentralization. (Background: Governor Chris Ngige, was kidnapped by the man who financed and rigged his election for not following through on back room promises some of which were made while the aspiring governor was naked. The bizarre incident caused a state constitutional crisis and political brawl that attracted national attention.) Embattled Governor Ngige apparently sought assistance from Ojukwu who chuckled when describing how he has been hiding so that no one will try to hand the troubles of Anambra over to him. He described the situation in Anambra as tragic and shared the CG's amazement at how Anambra's crooked politicians brazenly operate with impunity. "I told Ngige, as long as I have a picture of you naked, you're not fit to be a governor."

19. (SBU) Anambra, in Ojukwu's opinion, reflects a core problem in Nigerian politics -- too much power rested in the Federal Government. Ojukwu heavily advocated decentralization, saying that states only exist when based on constitutions that derive power from within the state, not from a "proclamation from the center." He identified a first step as giving powers to the already existing zonal structures, or regional groupings of states. In reflection, Ojukwu tied decentralization to his own political ghost of Biafra, believing that the GON's biggest but erroneous fear is that decentralization would reopen these old national wounds. "That was not the reason for the war," he pronounced. Ojukwu concluded that when politicians and individuals accept responsibility and address problems that need to be addressed, "Nigeria will stand as a beacon to the rest of Africa. I want to tell the people who are living here now that we haven't arrived there yet, but we will."

BIOGRAPHIC BACKGROUND

110. (SBU) Ojukwu was born November 4, 1933 in Zungeru, Niger State. He received his primary and secondary education in Nigeria and a B.A. and M.A. in the United Kingdom, studying history at Epsom College, Lincoln College, and the University of Oxford and concluded his education in 1962. He also received military training from the Eaton Hall Office Cadet School and Joint Services Staff College in the UK. Ojukwu enlisted in the Nigerian Army in 1957 and was based in the North, rising to the rank of Colonel in 1962. From 1966 to 1967, Ojukwu was appointed Military Governor of the defunct Eastern Region. In May 1967 he was proclaimed Head of State and Commander-In-Chief of the "Republic of Biafra" and was dismissed from the Nigerian Army in July of that year. In 1968 he was made General of the Biafran Army and held that position throughout the Biafran Civil War of 1967-1970. In January 1970 he was granted political asylum in Cote d'Ivoire and did not return to Nigeria until his pardon on June 18, 1982. He holds the traditional titles of Ikemba Nnewi and Eze Igbo, is married, and maintains his address at 29 Queens Drive, Ikoyi, Lagos. He has another residence in Enugu State. He will travel on 29 November to Maryland with his wife where he receives regular medical treatment for his eyes. He said that when in the US, he doesn't go out much and he is looking forward to staying in his hotel and reading his books. Ojukwu does not often like to travel saying, "I have a thing about traveling out of Nigeria. Ever since I returned from exile, I never felt comfortable leaving." His wife, however, is a frequent traveler and often buys products for her beauty shop in Nigeria.

HINSON-JONES